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## Italy

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### Italy Rejects GMO Corn Cultivation

**Report Categories:**

Biotechnology

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**Report Highlights:**

Basing on the advice of the inter-ministerial biotech seed Committee, the Italian Minister of Agriculture has rejected the request, made by a farmer of northern Italy, to plant GM corn, assuming that no coexistence with conventional crop is possible, in view of the precautionary principle and the fragmented structure of the local agriculture.

**General Information:**

On January 19, 2010, in response to a petition filed by Mr. Silvano Dalla Libera (a farmer and vice-president of Futuragra, a pro-biotech farmers' group) against Italy's ban on the cultivation of biotech crops, the "Consiglio di Stato" (Council of State) ordered the Ministry of Agriculture to issue procedures for biotech crop cultivation within 90 days (see IT 1008, "Italy, One Step Closer to Biotech Cultivation" 02/04/2010). Since that decision, two other developments have occurred: Italy's Biotech Seed Commission has rejected Mr. Libera's petition to plant biotech corn, and the Ministry of Agriculture then issued a decree specifically forbidding Mr. Libera from cultivating biotech corn.

The Biotech Seed Commission (BSC) was established by Decree 212/2001 and is an advisory body composed of members from the Ministries of Agriculture, Health, and Environment, as well as representatives from some of the 20 Italian Regions. The BSC met on March 18, 2010, to discuss the court ruling, Italy's EU obligations, and Mr. Libera's and other similar requests. Their decision was to ignore Italy's EU obligations and reject the farmers' request for all the usual reasons (the precautionary principle, lack of co-existence regulations, lack of research, and the need to safeguard the so-called 'Made in Italy' brand).

The rejection was not unexpected. Minister of Agriculture Zaia has been particularly outspoken against agricultural biotechnology in the lead up to Italy's late-March elections (in which Zaia is a candidate). Additionally, the new Minister of Health, Ferruccio Fazio, recently stated that "the Italian Government is not in favor of introducing GM crops, in consideration of the fact that the large majority of Italian farmers are against them."

To underscore his opposition to biotechnology, Minister Zaia then issued a decree, which he signed on television, rejecting Mr. Libera's request. The decree is very short and simply reads: "The request to plant GM corn hybrids, including the Mon810 event, submitted by the Dalla Libera Silvano Farm on 08/14/2006 is rejected." At this time, the decree also needs to be signed by the Ministers of Health and Environment. Speculation is that they will do so.

The bigger question is whether the government will comply with the ruling of the "Consiglio di Stato" and what Italy's growing number of pro-biotech farmers will do if they don't.